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ABSTRACT

While the news is considered a vitally important aspect of most radio stations' formats, broadcasters need to determine what a listener wants from the news-listening experience and how a station can program news in the form most desirable for the listener. This study, based on a Lawrence, Kansas, telephone survey of radio listeners, found that radio news is not of special importance to all listeners--younger listeners (college and "rock" listeners) placed less importance on news than did older or noncollege listeners and country, classical, and "middle-of-the-road" listeners; that music is the primary reason for listening to the radio, followed by news, companionship or background, and entertainment; that among reasons for preferring one station are radio news, local news, good coverage, personalities presenting the news, frequency of newscasts, understandability, reception, and quantity of news; and that some of the aspects of radio considered important are coverage of a wide range of subjects, giving details about what goes on behind the scenes, having on-the-scene reports from reporters in the field, and the quantity of news stories carried. (Author/JM)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF RADIO NEWS TO LISTENERS

A.E.J. Broadcast Journalism Session
August 3, 1976

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Radio news is considered to be a vitally important aspect of most radio stations' formats. Some recent studies indicate the importance of news on the radio for listeners. During the summer of 1975 one study found that 52 percent of all adults turn on their radios instead of watching television (20%) or reading a newspaper (21%) to get their first morning news.[1] A similar 1974 Opinion Research Corporation poll found radio to be the primary morning news source for 57 percent of adults; a 1971 poll showed a corresponding 52 percent. This does not, however, mean that radio is the primary overall news source for adults. A Roper poll found only 23 percent of adults indicate radio as their major overall news source.[2]

Aside from intermedia comparisons, it is important to ask: "What does a listener want from the news listening experience." Secondly: "How can a station program news in the most desirable form for listeners?"

Radio stations, of course, are not identical in their approach and programming of news. This study investigates several question areas

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[1] Summary of an Opinion Research Corporation nationwide sample of 2,164 adult men and women between July 11 and August 10, 1975. Broadcast Management/Engineering, December 1975, p. 6.

[2] Broadcasting, January 6, 1975, p. 27.

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relating to radio news, generated by observation of radio news programming trends across the country.[3]

1. How important is radio news in the radio listening experience? Trends: All-news and information formats or extended news blocks are continuing (and even picking up enthusiasts) on some stations. However, speciality beautiful music formats continue to eschew a strong news commitment. Overall, there is an effort to fit newscasts within the station's total format--with news as an integrated part of the entire programming mix.

2. What reasons contribute to listeners' favorite radio stations for news?

3. On what basis do listeners decide whether a radio station is doing a good job in giving the news?

   a. How important is coverage of a wide range of subjects, giving details about what goes on behind the scenes, and providing a large number of stories in a newscast? Trends: Short and fast paced news items continue to be packed into newscasts. Investigative probing for in-depth coverage of important issues occurs on some stations. Likewise, continued use is made of "mini-documentaries"--brief, in-depth, serialized investigative reports on one subject--to get behind the basic facts of an issue. On other stations, radio presents the immediate, "now", or "action" news--leaving in-depth analysis to television, newspapers, and news magazines.

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[3]Based on observations of the author as news research consultant with

b. How important is hearing the actual voices of the important people mentioned in the news and having on-the-scene reports from reporters in the field? Trends: There is increased use of actualities--bringing the sounds and voices of local events to listeners. Affiliation with networks and other audio services provides stations with more actualities for newscasts. Great reliance continues to be placed on the telephone for stories and actualities. Pocket police scanners, mobile two-way radios, walkie-talkie radios, portable telephones and other equipment augment the reporter's standard portable tape recorder for immediate newsgathering and flexibility.

c. How important is reducing repetition from hour to hour and having the news delivered with authority? Trends: Stations strive to revamp newscasts to reduce repetition. De-emphasis is on the "basso profundo"--deep booming voice--for establishing authority and credibility.

4. How long do listeners want newscasts to be? What is the projected "turn-off" of longer ten and fifteen minute newscasts or showt two or three minute newscasts? If longer newscasts are acceptable, when do listeners want them scheduled. What scheduling pattern is desired for newscasts of five minute and shorter length?

PROCEDURE

The population for the study consists of radio listeners who are temporary or permanent residents of the Lawrence, Kansas community. Lawrence is located between Kansas City and Topeka. Radio listening

includes major market, medium market and small market stations. Sample members were defined as being radio listeners through the use of the following screening question: "Do you spend one hour or more listening to the radio during an average week?" If the response to the question was positive, the listener was included in the sample.

All interviews were administered via telephone with telephone numbers drawn from a composite telephone directory of Lawrence and the University of Kansas students. After selecting numbers, a random constant was added to the last telephone digit. This technique compensates for unlisted telephone numbers and non-listed telephones in the highly mobile community. The sample was subdivided into a multiphase design to allow some different questions to be asked of subsamples. Interviewing was done during October and November, 1975.

FINDINGS

Importance of Radio News

Radio news is not of special importance to all listeners. To determine the importance of radio news within the radio listening experience, respondents were asked: "Are you a person who considers news important as a part of your radio listening, or do you more or less just catch the news because it comes on while you're listening to other things?" Socially desirable responses discovered in pretesting was limited by providing palatable positive and negative responses.

For the sample as a whole, 62 percent of the radio listeners contend news is an important part of their radio listening. On the other hand, 38 percent minimize the importance of news to them. (See TABLE I)

TABLE I

Importance of News

	Total Mention	Student Status		Sex	
		Student	Non-Student	Male	Female
Important Part	62.2	54.1	69.6	57.2	67.2
Just Catches News	37.8	45.9	30.4	42.8	32.8
Raw Total	N=519	N=255	N=263	N=269	N=247
		$x^2 p > .05$		x^2 N.S.	

	Age			Daily Radio Listening		
	25 and under	26-49	50 and over	0-60 minutes	1-3 hours	more than 3 hours
Important Part	47.7	68.4	85.7	62.0	58.2	70.1
Just Catches News	52.3	31.6	14.3	38.0	41.8	29.9
Raw Total	N=235	N=193	N=91	N=200	N=196	N=117
	$x^2 p > .001$			x^2 N.S.		

Musical Format

	MOR	Rock	Soft Rock	Oldies	Country	Classical	Beautiful Music
Important Part	60.7	49.0	51.6	60.9	69.8	71.2	66.7
Just Catches News	39.3	51.0	48.4	39.1	30.2	28.8	33.3
Raw Total	N=56	N=98	N=64	N=46	N=53	N=66	N=33
	$x^2 p > .01$						

Significant differences occur among different demographic and analytical groups in the importance of radio news. There is an inverse relationship between age and perceived importance of radio news ($p > .001$). While 86 percent of the listeners 50 years of age and older contend news is an important reason for radio listening, 68 percent of listeners 26 to 49 years of age and only 48 percent of listeners 25 years of age and

under make the same claim. More than half (52%) of the younger listeners fail to find news an important reason for radio listening. Additionally, college students in Lawrence are much less likely than non-students to place an importance on radio news. Seventy percent of the non-students respond news is important to them; 46 percent of the students just catch news ($p > .05$).

The importance of radio news also varies when tabulated by the type of musical format ($p > .01$). Listeners are designated into musical format categories by coding open-ended responses to these questions: "I know that your music tastes may change at different times of the day or night, but, in general, what kinds of music do you especially like to hear on the radio." "Just to make sure I understand, please give me three artists or groups that represent the type of music you most like to hear on the radio." The largest proportion of classical music, country music and beautiful music listeners stress the importance of radio news (71%, 70% and 67% respectively). Surprisingly, beautiful music listeners, with background rather than foreground listening patterns, argue the importance of news in their listening. The generalization, however, is tenuous and based on a small sample of beautiful music listeners (N=33).

A smaller majority of middle of the road and oldies musical format listeners stress the importance of radio news. This includes 61 percent of each category. Listeners classified in the more generic rock and soft rock categories are almost evenly divided. Fifty-one percent of the rock listeners and 48 percent of the soft rock listeners just catch the news when it comes on.

Reasons for Radio Listening

What is the most important reason for listening to the radio? Prior to asking the importance of news in the radio listening experience, multiphase subsample B (N=289) was asked the following question series: "Some people listen to radio for just one reason; others listen for several different reasons. As you think about it, what are the reasons you listen to radio at all? Of all the reasons you listen to radio, which one is most important?" The open-ended response provides the most important reasons for listening to the radio.

Overall, as could be expected, more listeners indicate music as the primary reason for radio listening than any other response. (See TABLE II) Forty-four percent of the listeners make that claim. News is the primary reason for slightly more than one out of five listeners (21%). Other listeners tune to radio for companionship or to provide background for other activities (13%). Still others primarily listen for the enjoyment or pleasure of entertainment on the medium (13%). Sports (4%) or time and weather (3%) are also mentioned by a few listeners as their primary reason for listening to the radio.

Significant differences emerge in the reasons for radio listening for different age groups ($p > .001$). Listeners 25 years of age or younger are most likely to listen for music (52%) while listeners 50 years old and older are most likely to listen primarily for news (35%). Also, younger listeners are most likely to listen for the pure entertainment while older listeners are more likely to listen for time and weather.

The reasons for radio listening also significantly differ depending on musical format. ($p > .001$). Music is the primary reason for

listening for more than half of rock (51%) and soft rock (55%) listeners. Additionally, music is the most important reason for listening for 45 percent of the country music listeners and 44 percent of the jazz listeners.

News, as the primary reason for radio listening, is most important for more country, M.O.R., oldies, and classical music listeners than for rock, soft rock, jazz and beautiful music listeners.

More beautiful music listeners indicate companionship or background as the most important reasons for listening than do other musical format listeners.

TABLE II

MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR RADIO LISTENING

	Total Mention	25 and over	26-49	50 and over	Male	Female
Music	43.6	52.2	37.4	32.6	47.1	39.8
News	21.1	11.0	28.0	34.8	19.7	22.7
Companionship and background	13.1	14.0	15.0	6.5	8.3	18.8
Enjoyment and pleasure	12.5	16.9	11.2	2.2	13.4	10.9
Sports	3.8	2.9	3.7	6.5	5.7	1.6
Time and weather	3.1	1.5	.9	13.0	1.9	4.7
Other	2.6	1.5	3.7	4.3	3.8	1.6
Raw Total	N=289	N=136	N=107	N=46	N=157	N=128
		$x^2 p > .001$			x^2 N.S.	

	0-60 minutes	1-3 hours	more than 3 hours
Music	38.0	50.5	40.9
News	25.0	16.5	25.8
Companionship and background	14.8	10.1	15.2
Enjoyment and pleasure	10.2	12.8	15.2
Sports	4.6	4.6	0.0
Time and weather	4.6	3.7	0.0
Other	2.8	1.8	3.0
Raw Total	N=108	N=109	N=66
		x^2 N.S.	

TABLE II (Continued)

	MOR	Rock	Soft Rock	Oldies	Country	Classical	Beautiful Music	Jazz
Music	32.1	50.7	55.1	37.8	44.9	38.2	41.3	44.4
News	28.3	11.9	6.1	31.1	28.6	25.5	17.4	11.1
Companionship and background	17.0	14.9	12.2	8.9	8.2	18.2	21.7	16.7
Enjoyment and pleasure	18.9	13.4	18.4	13.3	6.1	12.7	6.5	22.2
Sports	1.9	6.0	2.0	2.2	2.0	0.0	0.0	2.8
Time and weather	0.0	1.5	4.1	2.2	8.2	1.8	6.5	2.8
Other	1.9	1.5	2.0	4.4	2.0	3.6	6.5	0.0
Raw Total	N=53	N=67	N=49	N=45	N=49	N=55	N=46	N=36

$x^2_p > .001$

Reasons for Favorite News Station

Local news coverage is the primary reason listeners give for a favorite news station. (See TABLE III) Twenty-three percent of the listeners are most concerned with local news on their stations. Listening to the station all the time is the main reason for a favorite news station preference for eleven percent of the listeners. Good coverage (9%), personalities presenting the news (7%), frequent regularly scheduled newscasts (6%), shorter newscast lengths (5%), informative or understandable newscasts (3%), reception on the station (2%), the quantity of news (2%), and national news (2%) are other reasons for a favorite news station preference.

The local news coverage is particularly important for listeners 50 years of age and older (41%) compared with listeners 25 years of age and younger (12%). Listeners under 50 are more likely than older listeners to base a favorite news station preference on simply listening to the same station all the time. Younger listeners (25 years of age and younger) are also more likely than others to base a preference on the shorter length newscasts on the station.

What are the most important reasons for listeners who find news an important part of their radio listening experience? These listeners place greater importance than less interested news listeners on local news coverage, good coverage, frequent regularly scheduled newscasts, the quantity of news and national news. Listeners who just catch news are more likely than more interested news listeners to prefer a favorite news station because of the shorter newscasts on that station.

TABLE III

REASONS FOR FAVORITE NEWS STATION PREFERENCE

	Total Mention	25 and under	26-49	50 and over	Male	Female
Local news coverage	23.4	12.0	28.3	40.5	18.0	29.5
Listen to station all the time	11.1	12.6	11.8	6.3	11.8	10.0
Good coverage (quality, complete)	9.4	9.8	9.9	7.6	11.4	7.0
Personality (ies)	7.0	5.5	7.9	8.9	6.6	7.0
Newscasts regularly scheduled frequently	6.3	7.1	3.3	10.1	4.7	8.0
Shorter length; faster pace	4.6	6.6	2.6	3.8	5.2	3.5
Informative; understandable	3.1	3.3	3.3	2.5	2.4	4.0
Reception	2.4	3.8	1.3	1.3	3.3	1.5
More news (quantity)	1.9	2.2	2.6	0.0	2.4	1.5
National news	1.7	.5	3.3	1.3	1.9	1.5
Other	2.9	3.3	2.0	3.8	3.3	2.5
Don't know	26.1	33.3	23.7d	12.7	28.9	24.0
Raw Total	N=414	N=183	N=152	N=79	N=211	N=200
		$x^2 p < .01$			x^2 N.S.	

	0-60 minutes	1-3 hours	More than 3 hours	News Important Part of Listening	Just Catches News
Local news coverage	23.5	22.9	25.0	30.1	11.8
Listen to station all the time	9.2	12.1	12.0	11.2	11.8
Good coverage (quality, complete)	10.5	7.0	12.0	11.2	6.6
Personality (ies)	5.9	8.3	7.0	6.7	6.6
Newscasts regularly scheduled frequently	2.6	10.8	5.0	7.4	4.4
Shorter length; faster pace	4.6	3.2	7.0	3.3	7.4
Informative; understandable	2.6	3.8	3.0	3.7	2.2
Reception	.7	3.2	4.0	2.6	2.2
More news (quantity)	1.3	2.5	2.0	2.6	.7
National news	2.0	1.3	2.0	1.9	.7
Other	3.3	1.3	5.0	3.7	1.5
Don't know	34.0	23.6	16.0	15.6	44.1
Raw Total	N=153	N=157	N=100	N=269	N=136
			x^2 N.S.		$x^2 p < .01$

Desired Aspects of Radio Newscasts

On what basis do listeners decide whether a radio station is doing a good job in giving the news? A subsample of respondents was asked to indicate the importance of various aspects of a radio newscast. (The multiphase questionnaire B was answered by 142 respondents.) "I'm going to read a number of different things involved in radio newscasts. Please tell me whether it is very important, somewhat important, or not very important to you in deciding whether a radio station does a good job in giving the news." (See TABLE IV)

Coverage of a wide range of subjects is the most important consideration in evaluating newscasts. Seventy-five percent of the listeners stress the importance of the broad news coverage in making a positive judgment about the newscast. Nineteen percent indicate moderate importance to wide coverage, while 6 percent find this to be of little importance.

Giving details about what goes on behind the scenes is very important for slightly more than half of the listeners (51%). Thirty-five percent place moderate importance on behind-the-scene details and 13 percent minimize its importance.

Similarly, having on-the-scene reports from reporters in the field also is of great importance to half the listeners (50%). Thirty-two percent find it somewhat important while 18 percent indicate it is not very important to them in evaluating a station's newscasts.

Reducing repetition from hour to hour is very important for 47 percent of the listeners. Moderate importance is indicated by 28 percent and 26 percent attribute little importance to a station making the newscast different each hour.

Whether the person reading the news sounds like an authority is very important for 39 percent. Thirty-eight percent argue this is only

somewhat important to them. Twenty-four percent are not concerned with the "authority" with which the news is delivered.

The quantity of news stories carried is very important for 36 percent of the listeners. Forty-four percent stress moderate importance to the large number of stories covered in each newscast while 20 percent find this of little importance.

Hearing the actual voices of the people mentioned in the news is very important for 24 percent. Thirty percent indicate moderate importance while 46 percent find newsmakers' voices on the air not very important in evaluating the quality of a newscast.

TABLE IV

DESIRED ASPECTS OF RADIO NEWSCASTS

N=142

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important
Coverage of a wide range of subjects	74.6	19.0	6.3
Giving details about what goes on behind the scenes	51.4	35.2	13.4
Having on-the-scene reports from reporters in the field	50.0	32.4	17.6
Making the newscast different each hour	46.5	27.5	26.1
Whether the person reading the news sounds like an authority	38.0	38.0	23.9
The large number of stories covered in each newscast	35.9	43.7	20.4
Hearing the actual voices of the people mentioned in the news	23.9	30.3	45.8

Many desired aspects of radio newscasts do not vary significantly among various age groups or between male and female listeners. (See TABLE V) No significant difference among age and gender emerges for desiring a large number of stories covered in each newscast, the newscaster sounding like an authority, having different newscasts each hour, or reporting details behind the scenes. However, older listeners are

significantly more desirous of hearing the actual voices of newsmakers ($p > .05$). Younger listeners of both sex and women in general significantly desire radio newscasts to have on-the-scene reports from reporters in the field ($p > .10$). Twenty-six to 49 year old listeners are especially prone to positively evaluate the wide range of news coverage on a radio station ($p > .01$).

Radio listenership tends to be an important variable for the desired aspects of radio newscasts. Heavier radio listeners (more than three hours a day) place significantly greater importance than lighter listeners on hearing the actual voices of the people mentioned in the news ($p > .001$), and whether the person reading the news sounds like an authority ($p > .01$). Light listeners (one hour or less listening per day) are more desirous of hearing on-the-scene reports ($p > .001$). Average listeners (one to three hours of daily listening) are least likely to positively evaluate hearing details about what goes on behind the scenes, having on-the-scene reports from reporters in the field, having different newscasts each hour, and hearing the actual voices of newsmakers.

TABLE V

DESIRED ASPECTS OF RADIO NEWSCASTS (CONTINUED)

	AGE				Gender		
	25 and under	50 and 26-49	over		Male	Female	
Wide range of coverage	67.2	84.5	66.7	x_2^2=p > .01	76.8	72.6	x_2^2= N.S.
Details behind-the-scenes	51.7	55.2	45.8	x^2 = N.S.	56.5	46.6	x^2 = N.S.
Reporters giving on-the-scene reports	58.6	43.1	45.8	x_2^2=p > .10	43.5	56.2	x_2^2=p > .10
Different newscasts each hour	48.3	46.6	41.7	x_2^2= N.S.	43.5	49.3	x_2^2= N.S.
Person sounds like an authority	32.8	37.9	45.8	x_2^2= N.S.	33.3	42.5	x_2^2= N.S.
Large number of stories	31.0	41.4	37.5	x_2^2= N.S.	39.1	32.9	x_2^2= N.S.
Hearing actual voices of newsmakers	22.4	20.7	37.5	x^2=p > .05	21.7	26.0	x^2 = N.S.
Raw Total	N=58	N=58	N=24		N=69	N=73	

	Radio Listenership			
	0-60 minutes	1-3 hours	More than 3 hours	
Wide range of coverage	68.5	79.6	75.7	x_2^2= N.S.
Details behind-the-scenes	55.6	42.9	56.8	x^2=p > .10
Reporters giving on-the-scene reports	63.0	32.7	51.4	x_2^2=p < .001
Different newscasts each hour	55.6	32.7	54.1	x_2^2=p < .01
Person sounds like an authority	31.5	34.7	51.4	x_2^2=p < .01
Large number of stories	31.5	40.8	37.8	x_2^2= N.S.
Hearing actual voices of newsmakers	25.9	10.2	40.5	x^2=p < .001
Raw Total	N=54	N=49	N=37	

*Table constructed from percentage of respondents indicating each aspect as very important.

Chi square statistic based on 2x2 table with respondents categorized as very important and other.

Newscast Lengths

How long do listeners want newscasts to be? Phase A respondents (N=376) were asked this question series: "Newscasts can be given in all different lengths. I am going to read some suggestions about newscasts. As I read each item, please tell me whether it is something you would make a special effort to hear on the radio, something you would accept, but wouldn't go out of your way, or something you would rather not hear at all." Five newscast lengths were tested: 15 minutes, 10 minutes, 5 minutes, or 3 minute wraps of national, international, and local news as well as 1 minute of local news plus 1 minute of national and international news.

Surprisingly, longer newscasts are not as much of a "turn-off" as expected. (See TABLE VI and VII) For the total listeners responding to the question, 31 percent project a special effort to hear a 15 minute newscast while 29 percent would rather not hear the extended newscast. Older listeners are most prone to desire the 15 minute newscast (52%) while younger listeners are most negative (39% would rather not hear it). Classical music listeners and (surprisingly) beautiful music listeners are most in favor of 15 minute newscasts. Oldies and rock listeners are most negative.

Ten minute or 5 minute newscasts elicit similar responses. Twenty-five percent would make a special effort to hear a 10 minute newscast and 23 percent would seek out a 5 minute newscast. On the other hand, 27 percent would rather not hear a 10 minute newscast and 24 percent have the same negative reaction to a 5 minute newscast. Demographic groups vary little in reaction to the 10 minute and 5 minute radio news reports.

A major difference occurs for the acceptance of a 3 minute report

when compared to longer newscasts. A third (34%) of the listeners would rather not hear a three minute news wrap-up. The two minute report (one minute local news and one minute national and international news) evokes an even stronger negative reaction. Half of the listeners would rather not hear a brief highlights while only one in ten listeners would make a special effort to listen.

Overall, longer newscasts are acceptable for listeners, with abbreviated radio newscasts of 3 or 2 minutes drawing stronger negative reactions.

TABLE VI

DESIRED NEWSCAST LENGTH *Based on "Special Effort to Hear"

	Total Mention	Student	Non-Student	25 and under	26-49	50 and over	Male	Female
15 minutes	30.9	24.6	37.0	21.2	33.6	52.4	27.3	35.2
10 minutes	25.3	24.2	26.3	22.9	29.8	20.6	26.4	24.4
5 minutes	23.2	24.0	23.0	21.7	25.4	20.6	22.9	24.4
3 minutes	17.8	17.6	18.0	19.6	14.9	17.5	17.5	18.4
2 minutes	10.6	9.1	12.2	11.2	9.0	12.7	10.8	11.2
Raw Total	N=376	N=187	N=189	N=179	N=134	N=63	N=194	N=179

	MOR	Rock	Soft Rock	Oldies	Country	Classical	Beautiful Music
15 minutes	28.9	18.8	19.0	33.3	25.0	47.8	44.0
10 minutes	28.2	12.5	23.8	23.1	13.2	34.9	36.0
5 minutes	28.9	18.8	23.8	17.9	12.5	39.1	28.0
3 minutes	7.9	21.9	19.0	20.5	15.0	19.6	20.0
2 minutes	2.6	14.1	16.7	12.8	10.0	15.2	12.0
Raw Total	N=38	N=64	N=42	N=39	N=40	N=46	N=25

TABLE VII

UNDESIRABLE NEWSCAST LENGTH *Based on "Rather Not Hear"

	Total Mention	Student	Non-Student	25 and under	26-49	50 and over	Male	Female
15 minutes	29.0	35.3	22.8	39.1	23.1	9.5	32.0	24.6
10 minutes	26.6	28.5	24.7	30.2	23.8	19.0	25.9	26.7
5 minutes	24.3	21.3	27.3	21.2	25.4	28.6	23.4	25.0
3 minutes	33.8	32.6	34.9	26.8	37.3	46.0	35.1	33.0
2 minutes	49.5	49.2	49.7	43.0	55.2	55.6	49.0	49.7
Raw Total	N=376	N=187	N=189	N=179	N=134	N=63	N=194	N=179

	MOR	Rock	Soft Rock	Oldies	Country	Classical	Beautiful Music
15 minutes	36.8	45.3	31.0	46.2	22.5	17.4	12.0
10 minutes	25.6	35.9	23.8	25.6	34.2	9.3	8.0
5 minutes	23.7	20.3	21.4	28.2	30.0	15.2	20.0
3 minutes	26.3	31.3	28.6	28.2	45.0	28.3	36.0
2 minutes	55.3	45.3	45.2	38.5	57.5	45.7	48.0
Raw Total	N=38	N=64	N=42	N=39	N=40	N=46	N=25

Newscast Scheduling

In addition to determining opinions about desired newscast lengths, respondents were asked: "What time or times during the day would you like to hear....a 15 minute newscast? ...a 10 minute newscast? ...a 5 minute newscast? ...a 3 minute newscast? ...a 2 minute news wrap-up?"

Table VIII reports respondents who indicate they never want a certain length newscast scheduled. This further demonstrates the greatest acceptance of 5 minute newscasts, the surprising acceptance of 10 and 15 minute newscasts, and the negative reaction to very brief newscasts.

TABLE VIII

Undesirable Newscasts

(N=376)

	15 minutes	10 minutes	5 minutes	3 minutes	2 minutes
Never	29.0	24.2	20.7	31.7	44.6
Scheduled Time	71.0	75.8	79.3	68.3	55.4

$x^2 p > .01$ Chi square based on those respondents who never want a certain newscast scheduled.

If longer newscasts are acceptable, when should they be scheduled? (See TABLE IX) Not surprisingly, listeners would want the extended newscasts in the early morning (16%) or early morning and late afternoon (11%). Early afternoon (9%), late afternoon (7%) and evening (9%) are desired times for others for extended 15 minute newscasts. A similar scheduling pattern emerges for a 10 minute newscast.

The standard 5 minute newscast differs in desired scheduling with more listeners (10%) wanting the newscast every hour. Fewer listeners, however, are exclusively scheduling the 5 minute newscast in the early morning.

TABLE IX

SCHEDULING OF NEWSCASTS

N=376

	15 minutes	10 minutes	5 minutes	3 minutes	2 minutes
Never	29.0	24.2	20.7	31.7	44.6
Every hour	.8	1.9	9.6	9.6	7.7
Early AM (Before 10 am)	16.0	13.3	9.8	7.7	5.1
Late AM (10 am-Noon)	1.3	4.3	1.6	.8	.5
Early Afternoon (Noon-3 pm)	9.3	8.0	5.3	2.9	3.2
Late Afternoon (3 pm-6 pm)	7.4	5.1	6.4	3.2	2.7
Evening (6 pm-9 pm)	8.8	9.0	9.0	5.9	5.1
Late Evening (9 pm-Midnight)	4.0	4.8	4.3	4.8	2.9
Early morning and Late afternoon	11.4	8.2	8.2	5.3	3.2
Anytime	2.4	3.7	9.0	10.4	9.6
Don't know/No answer	9.6	17.5	16.1	17.7	15.4

CONCLUSIONS

Recognizing the inherent limitations of generalizing from a telephone survey in Lawrence, Kansas, several conclusions can be drawn for radio stations' newscasts.

Listeners want to be convinced that they are listening to a complete and comprehensive newscast. This is illustrated in their reference to a "wide range of subjects" as something particularly desirable. Therefore, it is necessary for a station to cover as much ground as possible during each newscast.

At the same time, however, a station should not sacrifice some "behind-the-scene" details in an attempt to cover "more stories." The "large number of stories" should not take precedence over "detail" in achieving a wide coverage of subjects. While the tendency at some stations has been to "machine gun" stories in rapid fire succession in an attempt to "broaden news coverage" and to speed up the newscast so it appears to move faster and in a more lively fashion, greater detail would be greatly appreciated by listeners.

Listeners also want to feel they are getting a behind-the-scene look at news events. Stories about events and people in the news should include more than superficial coverage. The detail--and selection of "relevant detail"--can differentiate a station from others. The listener wants something other than the same sterile "who, what, when, where" they can hear on any station or read verbatim in their newspaper. The interesting detail and the "perspective of why" will further distinguish the newscast.

A station's newscast is more interesting, most listeners claim, if it includes actualities. Clearly listeners want to hear on-the-scene reports from reporters in the field. Stations should, of course, make ample

use of actualities. Needless to say, this does not mean that actualities should be used for their own sake. Only those actualities that make a real contribution to the story should be included. Use of the telephone as a device for getting local actualities should be encouraged. This kind of direct link to the scene of the story can make news live. On-the-scene actualities are even more important if the station is targeting for younger demographics and/or women.

Many stations define "actualities" as being clips of the newsmakers' voices. Listeners are less concerned with the "voice" than with the reporter filing an on-the-spot report. However, a station which is vitally concerned with the 50 years of age and older listener should make greater use of newsmaker voice inserts.

Newscasts must be continually rewritten and updated to avoid perceived repetition and boredom for the long-term listener. Almost half of the listeners find "making the newscast different each hour" very important in judging the quality of a station's radio news effort.

During most of the day, newscasts should be kept brief. A five minute newscast once each hour tends to be the most palatable for the largest number of listeners. During most day parts this should be adequate. Longer newscasts can be a key element during the early morning drive time. Listeners are disproportionately desirous of longer newscasts during morning drive time. News service is not nearly so important to listeners during the late afternoon as it is during the morning.

One suggestion to integrate desired detail, without overburdening the newscast is the following scenario format:

1. Begin the newscast with headlines of the top three stories of the hour (even in teaser form).
2. The "big story" then is presented in greater detail with "behind-the-scenes" aspects. This story can be of greater length than other stories. The big story, if possible, should be an on-the-scene report.
3. Subsequent stories should be of moderate length with minimal detail.
4. Toward the end of the newscast, a rapid-fire succession of headlines should be presented. These should not be teasers, but rather complete headlines.

This format allows many stories (with broad coverage) into the newscast, with detail incorporated for the most important story of the hour.